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NEW GEAR

EXPERT OPINIONS ON ALL THE LATEST HOT KIT

NIKON D810A

Shoot for the stars with Nikon's first SLR designed specifically for astrophotography

D-SLR ▶ £3000, $3797 ▶ www.nikon.com

■ With its excellent resolving power and noise control, the D810 is popular with astrophotographers. Its standard sensor isn't the best for capturing nebulae, however, and in an interesting – if very niche – development Nikon has addressed this with the D810A, which has a modified infrared (IR) filter to make it four times more sensitive to the H-alpha (656nm) wavelength that these dust and gas clouds emit. The D810A has a native sensitivity range of ISO200-12800 (expandable to ISO100-51200) and a Long Exposure Manual (M*) mode that enables timed exposures up to 900 seconds, as well as the usual Bulb and Time modes. To help with focusing and composition when shooting in Live View there's also a new Virtual Live View Exposure Preview that brightens the on-screen image.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: By its own admission, Nikon has released this highly specialised SLR in part because it can: it has the technology and has seen a gap in the market. It will be interesting to see if any of this technology will trickle down to its more mainstream ranges in due course. Watch this space, if you'll excuse the pun...

AS THE D810A IS OPTIMISED FOR SO-CALLED DEEP SKY PHOTOGRAPHY, NIKON DOESN'T RECOMMEND THAT IT'S USED FOR GENERAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Gloxy Power Blade

LED constant light ▶ £126, $194 ▶ www.digitaltoyshop.co.uk

■ The stick-like design of this constant light source makes it handy for a range of effects, from portrait fill lighting to light painting. There are 10 brightness levels and four modes, a filter for shooting under tungsten light and a 1/4-inch thread for tripod mounting. The unit is powered by a rechargeable 7.4v 2000mAh battery. The Power Blade is an interesting solution that kicks out plenty of light, and features just enough options to make it a worthy kitbag addition. ★★★★☆

Hahnel Universal Flash Accessory Kit for Speedlites

Flash modifier ▶ £50/$80 ▶ www.hahnel.ie

■ It's amazing how a touch of flash can elevate your photography; add a light modifier and you'll be light-shaping like a pro, and this set from Hahnel includes five modifiers and a bracket. There's a simple softbox, a honeycomb diffuser, a mini snoot, a colour effect filter kit for mixed lighting conditions, and a bounce flash. While the Velcro straps for attaching the modifiers to your flashgun seem a cheap option they do the job, and keep the kit compact and lightweight. ★★★★☆

NANEU MILITARY OPS ALPHA

A decent-sized daypack at a fantastic price

Backpack ▶ £39, $136 ▶ www.naneubags.com

■ Naneu's Military Ops Alpha is a typical daypack, with an upper compartment for personal kit and a rear-access lower section that will snugly accommodate a Nikon D750 with 24-70mm lens, SB-910 flash unit and a 50mm lens. The camera section contains padded dividers to keep your gear safe, and there's an array of pockets on the front and sides, along with a selection of zipped pockets on the inside. The quality and weight of the fabrics is reassuringly sturdy and there's a good amount of padding where it's needed, making the bag comfortable to carry fully loaded. The straps offer plenty of scope for adjustment to enable a personalised fit, and the bag also features chest and waist straps for added comfort when trekking. At the price, this bag is outstanding value. ★★★★☆

Drobo Mini

Secure storage ▶ £282, $389 ▶ www.drobo.com

■ The Mini is a RAID system, which enables data to be stored across several drives, so if a drive fails your data will remain safe. Setup is straightforward: add four 2.5-inch drives up to a total of 8TB and the Mini sorts out the configuration. Our tests showed read speeds of 400 megabytes per second and write speeds of 300 megabytes per second using a Thunderbolt connection, which is exceptionally fast. There's little to fault with the Mini other than the price. ★★★★★

Lee Filters Field Pouch

Filter holder ▶ £38, $56 ▶ www.leefilters.com

■ Available in black or sand colours, the field pouch is designed to hold up to ten 100x100mm or 150x100mm filters. Made from tough fabric, it can be carried by a shoulder strap or clipped to a belt. Under the top flap are ten filter sections, with two zips that once released enable the concertina design to expand for easy access to your filters. The pouch offers excellent protection, but it would be useful if there were extra sections to store adapter rings and the filter holder. ★★★★☆